DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 502 PS 007 624

AUTHOR Kerckhoff, Richard K.; Kerckhoff, Florence G.
TITLE The Team: The Child and His Family.
PUB DATE 4 Apr 74
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Association for Children Under Six (Louisville, Kentucky, April 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Childhood Needs; *Children; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Family Life; *Game Theory; Individual Needs; Interaction Process Analysis; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parenthood Education; Reinforcement; Self Concept; Teamwork

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of games theory, this article suggests some ways in which young parents can increase the positive effects of children on their marriage. The plea is less for planned parenthood than for planned "education" for parenthood. Commonsense advice is presented for dealing with such issues as: self-actualization, parenthood education, the "television syndrome," positive reinforcement, and interpersonal communication. Four steps are suggested as priorities for parenthood: (1) the ability of parents to speak as a group, with self-confidence and some authority on the fate of children and parents; (2) the acquisition of more knowledge and information on parenthood and child development; (3) the reduction of the "Television Syndrome," or an investigation by parents of the role of TV in their children's lives; and (4) the ability to produce more empathetic and concerned individuals, with an emphasis on positive reinforcement. (CS)

ED100502

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

# THE TEAM: THE CHILD AND HIS FAMILY

Southern Association for Children Under Six
Louisville, Kentucky
April 4, 1974

Richard K. and Florence G. Kerckhoff
Department of Child Development and Family Life
Purdue University

## Part I

Although many people enjoy referring to families as teams, serious scholars have not used this figure of speech very often in their theoretical conceptualizations of family interaction. There has been, however, an attempt to conceptualize the family in terms of games theory, and it is at that point that we wish to begin our analysis of how various members of the family affect each other.

The marital relationship has often been described in games theory terms -- usually in terms of a "zero-sum" game or contest -- one in which there is a winner and a loser: if I score a point, my spouse loses a point. Less often has marriage been portrayed in scholarly works as a game in which points are scored for the team rather than for or against the individual "contestants."

Many years ago Ibsen claimed that "marriage is a very sea of calls and claims, which [redacted] have but little to do with love." Ten years ago, Eric Berne popularized this game approach in his book Games People Play. He brought to our attention how relationships between two individuals -- such as a husband and a wife -- tend to become routinized, stylized, repeated and regularized according to some unwritten but well understood rules -- much like a game. Further, marital relationships were not to be regarded as "fun and games" because often there was very little fun or play in the games husbands and wives played. Often these games are grim, serious business, with less play and more hostility, less enjoyment and more focus on brutal victory. Just break a rule, and you'll find out how serious the matter is. (Do you remember how Elizabeth Taylor broke the rules of her game with Richard Burton in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" -- how she was penalized for that infraction?

From this "games" point of view, child rearing is an educational process by which the child is taught what games to play and how to play them -- later, as he chooses friends or a spouse, he tries to find someone who will play his kind of games, or at least someone who can be beaten at his kind of games.

The person, for example, who plays the "IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU" game has to find a spouse who will restrict him (or her) so much that there will seem to be some validity to his perpetual excuse: I could have been happy, or a success, or beautiful, or rich, or something, IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU.

PS 007624

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Long before Berne, however, other writers viewed the family in terms of game theory, usually without calling it that. In one of his early works, Peter DeVries described this cozy marital scene:

> He had returned from work one evening the first winter of their marriage to find her shoveling snow in a mink coat, hacking at the doorstep with a garden spade, for hadn't he also neglected to get a proper shovel? . . . He had marched into the house and pulled from the bureau drawers all the shirts he could find without buttons and sewed them on.
>
> Thus, when she came in, it was to find him doing woman's work, equally neglected if it came to that. It was how they fought, doing one another's chores. She would mount the ladder and put up the storm windows he had been badgered in vain to get at; coming home to find that all shipshape, he would tramp inside and wash dishes let accumulate in the sink. Once a woman dropped in, of the neighborly sort who do so without knocking, to find both of them sitting on the parlor floor, polishing one another's shoes. "Aw," she said, beaming on the scene, "how sweet. I wish Jack and I got along like that."

(Through the Fields of Clover, 1959, p. 112)

And even before DeVries gave us his Monday Morning Quarterback analysis of marriage, we had the classical Gamesmanship and One-Upsmanship descriptions of the human comedy by Stephen Potter. Potter focused on conversation, which he analyzed in terms of tricks or ploys designed to improve a person's position by putting him one up and his "opponent" one down.

A typical Potter put-down is to let some authority on, say, Israel, talk and talk about the subject and show his extensive and very real knowledge -- and then say something vague, but impressive, such as, yes, what you say is rather true for the country as a whole, but not in the South. No matter what anyone knows about any place, you can always raise the reasonable doubt that it is true in the South. Another trick of Gamesmanship is to refer to ficticious authorities. Oh, did you find that to be so? Interesting that Gumplowicz assumed he did away with that myth.

Potter tells us how to behave -- as a Gamesman -- if a friend buys a more expensive house than we own: Oh, I think you've done so well with this house -- you got around the awkwardnesses admirably; I suppose you had to have the window there; of course, it's really from next door that this house really looks grand; I think it was wise of you to leave the old paint on the walls -- it's so hard to get painters to do a good job today. Points!

Doctors, Potter says, are just naturally one-up on anybody else; it's difficult to be in command of the situation when you have to stand around with no clothes on, being poked, and opening and shutting your mouth whenever some joker says "say ah." Of course, you might, in defense, inquire about the doctor's credentials for doing psychotherapy, but it is only about half a point.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



An American in England should, to show his gamesmanship, exclaim with great enthusiasm over the quaint charm of some especially modern, contemporary building. "Like something out of Kipling" is a good line. In school, according to Potter, scholars concentrate on subjects, but gamesmen concentrate on teachers.

Let me, then, turn to the question of learning to play the game. That seems like a proper concern for a school teacher. How about the games parents play? First, who taught us to play the parent game? Our parents; yes. But also our friends and our enemies. Books we read, movies we saw and TV. And perhaps we taught ourselves. And here's a switch: Maybe our children taught us to be parents, and we taught our parents to be parents. Or is that going backward?

At least I would like to suggest to you that we can learn something about family life by focusing on the impact children have on the adults who play the family game -- the affect of kids on marriages.

One of the fringe benefits of working on a college campus is that the professor learns something from the students -- and gets paid for doing it! We have learned, for example, that our students have very high expectations for marriage, and many of them work hard to convert their expectations into reality.

It's not that these young people are unrealistic, or even "over-idealistic," although being young and in love can blur one's view of reality. But they've seen too much marital hell to expect it to be celestial. Still, they expect good marriages -- better marriages than their parents have, and even better marriages than most of their friends have. Our own research has shown us that.

And, as mentioned, many of them are doing something more than simply expecting good marriages. They flock into our campus marriage preparation courses and our volunteer (non-credit) evening lecture and discussions of marriage. They put pressure on their churches for marriage study groups, and they provide the memberships and enthusiasms that have made the marriage enrichment program one of America's most exciting mass movements.

This is also the most self-conscious generation we have seen concerning communications in marriage. Sometimes we conclude that these young people have replaced the old fashioned marital obligations to love, honor and obey with the one new obligation: "communicate!" It's that important. Our students will read books about communication, will join groups which practice communications exercises, and will self-consciously monitor their own communications -- listen to themselves communicating -- in order to improve this aspect of their interpersonal relationships. It is that important.

This is the generation which, if they continue to express their current values, will make sex education and family life education universal in our schools, and will put tremendous pressures on the state, church and school to provide marital -- and pre-marital -- counseling. On our campus, they also are the generation which is asking to be trained to be family life and sex educators, and they have made our marriage counseling training the most popular program our Department offers.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Of course, another way this generation shows how important good marriage is, is by not getting married. Marriage, many seem to say, is not for everyone: Shape up or stay single. Some of those who are living together, but not married, are expressing a positive philosophy, not an anti-marriage philosophy. They are expressing the belief that marriage should be good -- really good -- and they will live together until they know that they can make a good marriage. Not every fool should marry, they say.

To be sure, all of our generalizations are subject to much exception. Some of today's college youth, like some of previous generations, have rather minimal expectations for marriage. And many more have high expectations, but low ambition to work to achieve these expectations. It was always thus. However, our general view is that the problem today is not low expectation or low involvement in making marriage work.

The problem that we see is that these enthusiasms regarding marriage are not matched by high expectations and high energy output regarding parenting. Marriage is a big responsibility, but parenthood is a bigger one. Marriage demands more than good intentions and a bumbling, leave-it-to-chance approach. To rear a child in today's world certainly requires no less. We receive the students' message loud and clear: "The institution of marriage needs improvement." And we respond with a message, hopefully of equal loudness and clarity: "So does parenthood!"

Luckily, many voices in our society are sending this message today. Governmental programs are putting new emphasis on training-for-parenthood in our high schools, books on parenting are selling well, private classes in raising parental competencies have sprung up everywhere, and on our campus, as in most universities, we do teach courses in education for parenthood. Still, compared with other educational emphases, parenthood gets very little of our attention in colleges, and Herbert Spencer's incredulity of 100 years ago is just about as pertinent today:

> If by some strange chance not a vestige of us descended to the remote future, save a pile of our school books or some college examination papers, we may imagine how puzzled an historian of the period would be on finding in them no indication that the learners were ever likely to be parents. "This must have been the curriculum for their celibates" we may fancy him concluding. "I perceive here an elaborate preparation for many things; especially for reading the books of extinct nations and of co-existing nations...; but find no reference whatever to the bringing up of children. They could not have been so absurd as to omit all training for this gravest of all responsibilities. Evidently then, this was the school course of one of their monastic orders."

But our nation recognizes that something must be done to improve our ability to rear future generations. Suggestions abound. Some experts see voluntary childlessness as the solution. Some advise marriage in two steps, with Step II being reserved for those people who are approved to be parents. Others believe that in the future we will prohibit mothers and fathers from working out of the home when children are young or are in special need

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

of parents. In general the experts seem to predict that our society will become more liberal and more tolerant regarding sex and marriage in the future, but more conservative and more strict in our regulations of conception and parenthood.

This would seem to me all to the good. At the very least I would expect couples to be most conservative before having that first child. Or at least to take a careful look at the possible effects that getting children might have on their marriage.

Of course, there are economic aspects to consider. Let's not pooh-pooh mere money. If I ask you and your spouse to spend $100,000 for something, isn't the economic aspect apt to be important to you? The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future estimated that it costs the average family between $80,000 and $150,000 to raise two children and send them through college. And that is just the direct cost -- food, housing, clothing, medical care, education; indirect costs -- money mama doesn't earn because she is home with baby or because she abandons her career -- would push the cost of child rearing even higher. As one wit put it, parents know there is no such thing as free love. And someone said a family man is one who replaces the currency in his billfold with snapshots of his kids.

At least, viewed from the perspective of the marriage, children reduce dramatically the economic assets available to husband and wife. This has to have some effect on the marriage.

But, as we all know, children affect marriage in many areas other than the economic area. Is there any part of a marriage that they do not affect? Eating changes -- meals just aren't the same now that we are three, or four, or more. Conversation will never be the same. Recreation? Sorry, the jet set will have to go to the Riviera without us this year. In-laws? Research on divorce documents the sticky effect children have on our relations with our in-laws. After all, they are the kids' grandparents. Sex? Any marriage counselor could speak for hours on how sexual relations are different with children in the house. Friendships? Fortune magazine's research showed that by and large in suburbia, the tricycle gang made friends first, their pursuing mothers met and made friends next -- and the husbands? Oh, they just went along with their wives to the next charades and cheese dip party -- whether they liked the other fellows or not.

Maybe this is why the research, which tries to measure the impact of children on marriage, is generally so gloomy.

Hurley and Palonen reported that the higher the rate of children per years of marriage, the less satisfactory is the marital relationship. Feldman found that couples reported less and less satisfaction with marriage as they conceived more and more children. And the most happily married couples were childless. LeMasters found that the adjustment of couples to their first child was usually defined by them as "an extensive" or "severe crisis." He says, "Children and parenthood have been so romanticized in our society that most middle-class couples are caught unprepared even though they have planned and waited for this event for years. The fact that parenthood is normal does not eliminate crisis." Of course, not all marriages suffer from the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



addition of a new team member. Good marriages, the research seems to indicate, suffer less than marriages which were poor to begin with. But they, too, seem to suffer some. And the generalization probably holds for both husbands and wives, young and old, black and white, rich and poor -- some suffer more than others, but most marriages suffer to some extent when children join the team.

I don't view this as a plea for membership in NON - The National Organization for Non-Parents -- but simply an antedote for the romanticizing of parenthood LeMasters mentioned -- especially for people who have a happy, companionate marriage as one of their life goals.

My point, then, is that our students who are clamoring for marriage education, who are learning to communicate with their future spouses, and who are sincerely eager to enrich their marriages -- should also be clamoring for parent education. Good education for parenthood can be justified because it helps children -- but I am justifying it because it is important to marriage. If a good marriage is less strained by the advent of parenthood, I am guessing that marital partners who are also good at parenting will be less traumatized by the arrival of children on the family team.

Therefore, our plea is less for planned parenthood than it is for planned education for parenthood. As we see this, education should be both preventive -- it should prevent some of the shock of becoming an ill-prepared parent -- and enriching. It should enrich what might well be one of life's most rewarding enterprises, playing the family game with other adults and with children.

## Part II

Our own suggestions for helping to increase the positive effects of children on the marriage, and, therefore, the effects of specific marriages on children, encourage four steps as priorities for parenthood:

1. The first priority is a need for parents and parenthood to gain some status -- some important self-confidence, ability to speak with some authority as a group on the fate of children and parents in this country. We are tired of parents being blamed for all the ills of society, and more tired of them accepting this blame. When parents became the introverted, meek, silent majority they did, I am not sure; when they fell at the mercy of every psychiatrist, psychologist and speaker at early childhood conferences, I don't know; but I really believe that the time has come for parents to be heard about every issue affecting their role and about every outside influence on their children. Parents will not be effective individually; this has been proved again and again. They are hardly effective through vastly underpopulated groups such as PTA's and child care organizations, but by allowing themselves to be unorganized and undermined, by acting as if everyone in the world and on the TV screen knows better than they what is best for them and their children, they create an image of unintelligent, dependent, unworthy individuals.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE


I believe that it is time for parents to be heard, to make known as a group their concerns, their wishes, their demands, if you will. I believe that every community should have an organization of parents which will see to it that their and their children's potentials are enhanced by every other individual and every agency and service of society. I know of no group who works as hard, who does as good a job, who has as much interest and sustained energy for their job as those who are parents, and I know of no group who gets as much blame and little reward.

2. The next priority deals with a desire for parents to have more knowledge and information about where to get adequate help to make their roles more productive. Stating as a preface that I know that many individuals may disagree with me, let me say that I believe that the best parents I know are those who know something about the growth and development of young children and have made it their business to find out and learn.

In no job in the world would we go about our business as untrained as we do the business of rearing children. No farmer plants without knowing the condition of his soil; no teacher teaches without studying both the content to be taught and the people to be taught; no doctor takes out an appendix or prescribes medication without expert knowledge of both the human body and drugs, and yet a majority of individuals in the world will attempt the most difficult of professions, parenthood, by a hit, and often miss, approach.

I do not believe any individual, teacher, day care instructor, store sales person, conductor on the bus, policeman, lunch room manager, nurse in the hospital, and most of all, parents, should tamper with the lives of children without good knowledge and information about how children develop, how they learn, how they grow, how they express and inhibit feelings, how they become successful, and what produces failure.

Asking questions will help illustrate what I mean: How do we know when a child is telling a little white lie, takes something by mistake, or is on the road to becoming a thief? How do we know when a child needs special help, is getting along all right, or is going through a stage? How do we decide what effective discipline and guidance are for any age? How do we answer questions like: is spanking all right, is TV bad, is he behaving this way because he is two or because he has a problem that needs help?

A teacher of blind children once asked me to tell her how she could tell if children were behaving the way they were because they were blind or because they were three years old. This was a very perceptive question for it implies that we do know about what fair expectations are to set up for children; we do know the signs which signal problems, potentials, needs for priorities.

We should give high priority to education for parenthood -- a course in parent education for every parent-to-be, or present parent, and a course in child development for every other adult member of society, including the secretary in an office building, the president of a university, the chairman

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



of the National Television Board, and even the President of the United States. I believe this is important because every child's development is touched often by all of society's adults.

3. A third priority deals with reducing the "Television Syndrome." As debates range about the good and bad effects of TV on children, statistics are out indicating that by the time a child finishes high school, he will have had 11,000 hours of schooling and 15,500 hours of TV. Assuming that a child eats, sleeps, bathes and does a very few other things, what time is left for parent-child relationships?

Needless to say, not every child watches television this much: some watch less, but, of course, some watch more, and the effects of mass media are more widespread than any of us ever dreamed possible. It is hard to imagine the large group of American parents who are willing for their children to gain values, information and role-models from a little box which gives information and facts planned by individuals who, for the most part, have little or no understanding of children, family life and community life in our country today. An afternoon of soap operas alone would have most of us taking an overdose of sleeping pills if we thought this were an adequate portrayal of most of human life that goes on around us today. Each parent needs to become a researcher, to learn what programs his youngsters watch, what values are being stressed and at the very least, supervise and interact with children about what they are seeing.

A survey asked several children, "What will being grown-up be like?" Invited answers to the effect that they would feel "poorly" as one youngster put it, "most of the time," and that they would "need a lot of money for medicines and soaps to wash their clothes."

Tired, headachy adults do not give children a positive view of the worth of growing up. A recent article commenting on a foreigner's views while visiting our country and watching TV, states it well. "Nowhere," he declares, "is the average citizens asked more frequently to examine himself for colds, neuralgia, backache, underarm odor, headaches, constipation, blackheads, neuritis, bursitis, arthritis, sinusitis, indigestion, stomach trouble, piles, eczema, athlete's foot -- all the troubles for which medicines are available at the drug store. I came over to your country a well man," he explains. "After one week of listening to your television commercials, I felt very ill!"

It would be unintelligent to say that all TV is bad. There is much that is positive, that brings a child face to face with a world he would have no knowledge of it it weren't for television. However, some priority must be given to deciding what is really good for our individual children, who interprets all the content and who knows what is taken from TV. Primarily, priority should be shown for giving children a view of the importance of health and good physical activity and the importance of planning their lives to include active participation, not just passive viewing. Children should be "doers," not just viewers.

The fourth priority deals with the need to be able to produce more empathetic, concerned, compassionate individuals; to do this, we are going to have to become a "put up" rather than a "put down" society. One doesn't

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



have to have teenagers today to know the term "put down," and one doesn't have to go far to hear the number of put-downs we all use all of the time. I collected 117 in one two-hour stretch in an airport recently, and another 50 in a department store in Indiana. Let me share a few with you ---

1. 5-year-old to 3-year-old: "You stink; you ain't no good; God will kill you, and you'll be sorry."

2. Teenager to teenager: "You are the most stupid, dumbest kid I've ever seen; I don't know why they let you live even."

3. An adult response to an angelic little boy telling everyone he passed, including me, "In just three more day, I'll be four years old, in just three more days, I'll be four, I really will." -- "Well, you had better be a good boy or you won't ever see that birthday."

4. About 8-year-old to about 7-year-old: "I hope your ass goes up in smoke; it sure smells stinky."

5. Wife to husband: "Don't tell me how to spend my money. You've never made so much for any of us that you can tell me what to do. Why don't you go to college? You'd probably flunk out just like your brother did."

6. About 70-year-old to 50-year-old daughter in fitting room at department store: "This doesn't look like a spring dress to me." 50-year-old: "Well, it fits you nicely." 70-year-old: "How in hell would you know? It's not even on yet. It's hanging off one shoulder. I don't want you advice. You always look like you just got out of bed."

7. Mother to 2-year-old in bathroom booth: "You pee in that toilet this minute or you are walking out of here without your pants on." Loud cry from child. "Hurry up and pee. If you don't, I'm smacking your bottom and you're going out there naked. I'm not washing any pants you wet." More wailing and then a slam of the door, and a pantless child is dragged out of the bathroom by a fierce looking mother.

Exaggerations? Not at all! Listen all around you.

For emotional health of both adults and children, I firmly believe that every day must be tipped on the positive side; if the day contains more "no's" than "yes's" for either child or adult, it is, in the words of Lucy in the "Peanuts" comic strip, "a failure day." For every day that has more problems than solutions, more defeats than successes, more fatigue than energy, more boredom than interest, more negatives than positives, we tell ourselves and our children that we aren't or they aren't very worthwhile, likeable, good at our jobs. The results of such messages can be devastating.

Learning how to be effective marital partners and effective parents go hand in hand. Strengths in marriage and parenting are reciprocal as are lacks of success in either. We now must find better ways of fostering new and more varied methods for learning to effectively educate for parenthood and marriage. Each marital partner and each parent must find enthusiasm and energy for both roles, and every child in a family, no matter how many, should

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



reap the benefits of loving, concerned parents. For me, Irma Bombeck, the well-known columnist, states it well -- let me close with her comments: She says:

"It is normal for children to want assurance that they are loved. Having all the wrath of the Berlin Wall, I have always admired women who can reach out to pat their children and not have them flinch.

"Feeling more comfortable on paper, I wrote the following for each of my children.

TO THE FIRSTBORN

"I've always loved you best because you were our first miracle. You were the genesis of a marriage, the fulfillment of young love, the promise of our infinity.

"You sustained us through the hamburger years...the first apartment furnished in early poverty...our first mode of transportation (1955 feet) ...the 7-inch TV set we paid on for 36 months.

"You were new, had unused grandparents, and had more clothes than a Barbie doll. You were the 'original model' for unsure parents trying to work the bugs out. You got the strained lamb, open pins and 3-hour naps.

"You were the beginning.

TO THE MIDDLE CHILD

"I've always loved you best because you drew a dumb spot in the family and it made you stronger for it.

"You cried less, had more patience, wore faded clothes, and never in your life did anything 'first' but it only made you more special. You are the one we relaxed with and realized a dog could kiss you and you wouldn't get sick. You could cross a street by yourself long before you were old enough to get married, and the world didn't come to an end if you went to bed with dirty feet.

"You were the child of our busy, ambitious years. Without you we would never have survived the job changes, the house we couldn't afford, and the tedium and the routine that are marriage.

"You were the continuance.

AND TO THE BABY

"I've always loved you best because endings are generally sad, and you are such joy. You readily accepted the milk-stained bibs. The lower bunk. The cracked baseball bat. The baby book, barren but for a recipe for graham cracker pie crust that someone jammed between the pages.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



"You are the one we hold onto so tightly. For you see, you are the link with a past that gives a reason to tomorrow. You darken our hair, quicken our steps, square our shoulders, restore our vision and give us humor that security, maturity and endurity can't give us.

"When your hair line takes on the shape of Lake Erie and your children tower over you, you will still be 'The Baby.'

"You were the culmination."